

Sūrah Duḥā

Central Theme and Relationship with Preceding and Succeeding Sūrahs

This *sūrah* along with the succeeding one: Alam Nashrah form a pair. In both these *sūrahs*, the Prophet (sws) is assured that he will succeed in the mission he has been entrusted with by the Almighty. All the hardships he is now facing will come to an end. This subject is also discussed in previous *sūrahs*. However, it is discussed in a subsidiary manner. In these *sūrahs*, it is discussed as the primary subject. It is as if in the backdrop of both these *sūrahs*, all the phases of his life are brought before him. The style of assurance adopted in both *sūrahs* reflect their period of revelation. It is evident from Sūrah Duḥā that it was revealed in that part of the Makkan period in which the Prophet (sws) was facing intense opposition; so intense was it that he became dejected at not seeing room for any progress of his mission; on the other hand, it is evident from Sūrah Alam Nashrah that it was revealed in the period when in spite of strong opposition some signs of success had started to manifest.

Analysis of the Sūrah

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Initially, signs in the world around man are cited to show that just as for the material development of this world, the heat and light of the day are needed and so are the coldness and darkness of the night similarly, for the development of hidden potentials in a person, it is essential to make him pass through both ease and difficulty and sorrow and happiness. People who understand the importance of such trials for their training and instruction and also benefit from them, develop their latent qualities through them and those who do not know how to come to grips with such circumstances or because of their feeble and frail nature do not take advantage of these circumstances which have been destined for them deprive themselves of this high place which no one can achieve unless he passes this test.

After a delineation of this principle, the Prophet (sws) is addressed and given assurance that the trial he is passing through is not because the Almighty has no concern for him or because He is angry with him. It is part of the greater trial which is essential for the moral development of a person.

He is then given glad tidings of the fact that the period through which he is currently passing is a prelude to better times in which His gracious Lord will bless him with success which will make him happy.

After this, an indication is made of some of the phases of his life which occurred before prophethood or occurred in its beginning which were apparently tough and from which the Almighty led him out. Such was this divine help that the whole world became accessible to him and he was also blessed spiritually.

At the end, he is guided to fulfill the obligations towards these favours bestowed on him. This is also a passing comment on people who have been mentioned in previous *sūrahs* who after being blessed with favours became proud and usurped the rights of God's creatures.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالضُّحَى (١) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى (٢) مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَى (٣) وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَى (٤) وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَى (٥) أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَى (٦) وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى (٧) وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى (٨) فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ (٩) وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ (١٠) وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ (١١)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The time of mid-morning bears witness and the night when it becomes still that your Lord has neither abandoned you nor is He displeased with you. And the coming period shall be better for you than the previous one. And your Lord will give you such that you shall be pleased. (1-5)

Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter? And found you wandering and guided you? And found you in need and enriched you? (6-8)

So, do not suppress the orphan and do not scold the one who asks and proclaim the favour of your Lord. (9-11)

Explanation

وَالضُّحَى (١) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى (٢)¹

الضُّحَى refers to the time of mid-morning when people begin their daily routines and after resting the whole night start their day with a new vigour.

1. The time of mid-morning bears witness and the night when it becomes still.

The Qur'ān has presented the night as an evidence on various aspects depending upon the context, as is evident from this *tafsīr*. Here the words *إِذَا سَجَى* qualify it. The word *سَجَى* means “to become stationary” and “to come to a standstill”. This shows that that part of the night is implied here which becomes still and silent from the noise and clatter of the day and of the early part of the night and is able to provide comfort to man. In other words, in contrast to the part of the day which is referred to by the word *الضُّحَى*, the words *وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى* refer to the corresponding part of the night.

A little deliberation shows that the day and the night are totally different from one another with regard to their outlook, nature and the effects they produce; however, despite this difference, man needs both, and this world, in its collective capacity, also needs both the night and the day for its sustenance. It is God's great mercy that He created the night with the day and the day with the night, and both work in complement to each other to keep this world in existence. The Qur'ān has referred to this complementary nature of day and night at various instances:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا (٦٧:١٠)

He it is who has made the night dark for you so that you can receive comfort in it and made the day bright. (10:67)

وَمِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (٧٣:٢٨)

And of His mercy is that He has made the night and day so that you can receive comfort in the night and seek His bounty in the day so that you become grateful [to Him]. (28:73)

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَى² (٣)

It is to validate this premise that oaths are sworn by various phenomena of the physical world in the previous verses. The implication is that just as in this world the heat and light of the sun are essential and so are the darkness and stillness of the night, in a similar manner, the trials of happiness and sorrow, ease and difficulty, affluence and poverty are essential for the spiritual and moral development of man. It is through these circumstances that the Almighty tests a person whether he

2. That your Lord has neither abandoned you nor is he displeased with you.

becomes thankful in hard times and patient in bad ones. In other words, the Prophet (sws) is assured that if at that time he was facing stiff opposition and had little following and meager resources and divine guidance and revelation were also not to his satisfaction, then this does not mean that his Lord had abandoned him or was displeased with him: these circumstances are a trial and test to train and instruct him in order to fully prepare him to bear his responsibilities.

All this content which is sounding assurance to the Prophet (sws) is implied in this verse. This content is also evident from the previous verse and the succeeding ones as well as the next *sūrah* also. However, to give due consideration to brevity, in the complement of oath (*muqṣam* 'alayh) only that part of the assurance has found mention which the Prophet (sws) needed the most at that time: he has been assured that the circumstances he was facing at that time do no relate to the fact that the Almighty had become indifferent to him or was unhappy with him. He was facing these trying circumstances in accordance with the practice and law of the Almighty regarding training and instruction.

It should be kept in consideration that in the Makkan period, when the opposition from the Quraysh became pronounced, the Prophet (sws) became worried that perhaps some of his own errors or strategic mistakes might have caused this augmentation in their animosity. This might have made the Almighty angry as a result and he was facing these trying circumstances as a wrath of God. This feeling of course was very burdensome as is evident from the following verse of the next *sūrah*:

(وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (94:2-3)) (and relieved you of the burden which weighed your back? (94:2-3))

Quite naturally, he would wait anxiously for divine revelation in this state of worry because it was the only thing which could show him light and it was through it that he could estimate whether he was fulfilling his obligation of preaching to the satisfaction of the Almighty or if something was amiss in discharging this duty or if he was committing some strategic mistake in this matter. As far as the time of revelation is concerned, it is based entirely on the wisdom of the Almighty. It is not necessary that a revelation descend when the Prophet (sws) is worried or anxious. Consequently, in such circumstances his worries would naturally double while waiting for a revelation. This worry of the Prophet (sws) has been mentioned in many places in the Makkan *sūrahs* and we have been referring to it. Those who would like to know the details should look up the *tafsīrs* of Sūrah Tāhā and Sūrah Qiyāmah.

The assurance sounded in these verses relate to the circumstances just mentioned. It is not necessary that this verse had been revealed in response to the taunt of the disbelievers that the Lord of this person had

forsaken him. When, in the first place, did the disbelievers accept the fact that the Prophet (sws) or the message he preached had something to do with God and that He would send revelations to him. They would regard the Prophet (sws) to be a poet and a soothsayer. Moreover, only the Prophet (sws) experienced the coming of a revelation or the lack of it. How would the disbelievers have known whether the Prophet (sws) would be receiving a revelation or a break had occurred in it. As far as preaching and propagation are concerned, not for a day did the Prophet (sws) desist from them. How could then the disbelievers have taunted him that he no longer was serving the Almighty in the capacity of a Messenger or that the Almighty had forsaken him.

وَلِلْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ (٤)³

Here the words *آخِرَةُ* and *أُولَىٰ* do not refer to the terms the “Hereafter” and “the Herein” respectively. They are general in their connotation: they refer to the initial or later period of the preaching mission or to its present and future state.

This verse is an explanation of the assurance sounded by the previous verse: the current circumstances will soon change and the future will be better than the past and the present. These glad tidings of a better future are given by the Qur’ān both openly and tacitly at many places. In the ancient scriptures also, the predictions which are mentioned about his advent cite the parable that the beginning of his preaching would resemble a mustard seed which indeed is very small but outgrows all other vegetable plants when it sprouts – so much so that birds build their nests on it.

The glad tidings sounded by the word *خَيْرٌ* are comprehensive in nature. It gathers in it the aspects of supremacy and victory of Islam, the conquest of Makkah, humiliation of the enemies and people entering the folds of Islam in multitudes. All these aspects are mentioned in the previous *sūrahs*. The next *sūrah* also alludes to them and they will also be found in *Sūrah Naṣr*.

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ (٥)⁴

Although it is not mentioned what the Almighty will give, however, intrinsic indications show that it refers to the *خَيْرٌ* whose glad tidings are given in the previous verse and which embraces all those successes and triumphs that were notched up by Islam in later years. Since these

3. And the coming period shall be better for you than the previous one.

4. And your Lord will give you so that you shall be pleased.

triumphs were yet to materialize, the second object of the verb يُعْطِيكَ has been suppressed in this verse; however, the word فَرَضَى has hinted at the fact that the Almighty will bless him so much in this regard that he will become very happy. This one word comprehensively embraces what a whole book cannot encompass.

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَى (٦) وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى (٧) وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى (٨)⁵

It is stated in verse four that the Prophet's future will be better than what he is encountering now. Here, in this verse, some examples are cited from the Prophet's life to emphasize this fact. He is asked to ponder on his own life to see a grand picture in this regard.

First of all, a reference is given to him being an orphan. Being an orphan is no less a problem in itself and if a society is also so uncaring about orphans as the Arab society was in those days, then an orphan is left with no place to go. The Qur'ān has described this aspect of the Arab society in the previous verses. Thus it is said: (١٧:٨٩) كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (Nay! But you do not respect the orphans, (89:17)). Similarly, while referring to certain individuals of the Prophet's own family, it is said: (١٠٢:٢) فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ (he is the one who shoves the orphan, (102:2)).

However, in the case of the Prophet (sws), it was a sheer blessing on the part of the Almighty that though his father did not leave behind much of a legacy, his grandfather and after him, his paternal uncle brought him up with great respect and affection. In normal circumstances, it is not at all rare to find a grandfather and an uncle feeling affection for their orphaned grandson and nephew and in fact is an obvious requirement of human nature; however, in the morally bereft society of Arabia, the existence of such feelings was indeed rare and it would not have been possible unless the Almighty bestowed a reflection of His love on an orphan the way He did in the case of Moses (sws) so that he was brought up in the very palace of his greatest enemy: the Pharaoh.

The words وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى refer to the spiritual favour of the Almighty on the Prophet (sws) which he received in the later part of his life.

It is known that the Prophet's upright nature was not for a moment satisfied with the religious customs and traditions he inherited from his forefathers and there was no other guidance available also which could satisfy him. The condition of the followers of various divine religions that existed in his surroundings is apparent from Sūrah Baqarah, Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān and other Madīnan sūrahs: such was the distorted shape of

5. Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter? And found you wandering and guided you? And found you in need and enriched you?

their faith and deeds that a person searching for the truth could not obtain any guidance from them. This situation had made him very anxious and this anxiety is referred to by the words **وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى**. The word **ضَالًّا** here does not refer to a person who is led away from the truth; it refers to a person who is in search for the truth. The prophets of God have an upright nature even before they are given the responsibility of prophethood. Even in the early part of their lives they never deviate from the obvious norms of human nature; however, human nature can only guide a person in broad areas of faith and deeds. It cannot explain all the corollaries and consequences of all articles of faith nor is it capable enough to define the exact limits of all deeds and morals. Therefore even an upright person who lives by the guidance provided by his nature still needs to know the attributes of God and the requirements of faith in the attributes of the God on whose existence his heart bears evidence. He wants to know the obligations which he owes to His Creator and how he should discharge them. He also wants to know how he should lead his life in such a disciplined manner that even the distant aspects of his life are spent in subservience to God. Unless these questions are answered, a person does not receive real satisfaction and neither is he able to establish a relationship with the Almighty on the right footings. These were the questions which bombarded the Prophet (sws) in the phase of his life referred to by the words **وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا**. Obviously this state of his can neither be regarded as of error nor of guidance. In precise words, this state of his reflects his effort to seek the truth. In other words, it is as if a person is standing on a crossroad and is unable to decide the path he should adopt. Before being given the responsibility of prophethood, the Prophet (sws) would be actually contemplating all these questions in the secluded cave of Hirā.

Some books do describe the state of people who were followers of the Dīn-i Ḥanīfī that some of these remained so perplexed that they would sit and lean against the walls of the Baytullāh and since there was no means for them to know the manner in which they could worship the Almighty, they would express their yearning to worship the Almighty the way He wanted. This must also be the situation the Prophet (sws) would have been facing until he was blessed with divine guidance. Consequently, the Qur'ān has referred to this state of the Prophet (sws) in the following words: **وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِن جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي بِهِ مَن نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا** (٥٢:٤٢) (Thus have We inspired you with a spirit which is from among Our directives. Neither were you aware of the scripture nor of faith. But we made this revelation a light whereby We guide those of Our servants We desire, (42:52)). In Sūrah

Yūsuf, this state is expressed by the word غفلة in the verse وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الْغَافِلِينَ (and indeed before this you were among those are not aware, (12:3)).

In the verse وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى the needy and affluent referred to are more related to the spiritual realm than the material one. If a person's heart is devoid of faith, then such a person is a needy person even if he has the treasures of the world, and if his heart is radiant with faith then he is a rich person even if he wears the clothes made from animal hides and lives on wild honey and locusts like the Prophet John (sws). It is to this reality that the famous adage الغنى غنى القلب (real affluence is the affluence of the heart) refers to. This real affluence is gained through faith, a true comprehension of the Almighty and through the light of guidance provided by the Book of God. He who has not been able to lay hands on this wealth can never quench his thirst for material wealth and he who is anxious for this wealth always yearns for more.

This world is a place of material resources and hence man is in need of these resources. If in some way the wealth of Khadijah (rta) was able to benefit the Prophet (sws), then this was her own good fortune and also that of her wealth which can seldom be achieved by any other person and by the wealth he possesses. However, the affluence referred to here is not achieved through wealth only as alluded to earlier; it is primarily a consequence of the guidance mentioned in the previous verse and whose real manifestation is the *sharḥ ṣadr* (inner satisfaction) whose details are afforded in the next *sūrah*, Sūrah Alam Nashrah, which forms a pair with Sūrah Duḥā. People who have regarded the affluence mentioned in this verse as the affluence attained on the basis of wealth have only been able to grasp the apparent; however, the reality in this regard is beyond the apparent – it cannot be seen; it can only be understood. Here I have contented myself with brief hints on this issue. In the last verse of this *sūrah*, and in Sūrah Alam Nashrah, I will discuss some of its veiled aspects.

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ (٩) وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ (١٠) وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ (١١)⁶

This is a mention of the obligation one owes to the favours mentioned in the previous verses. The style adopted is actually a critical comment on people who have been described in previous *sūrahs* as those who instead of showing gratitude on the favours of God they have been blessed with arrogantly think that they were actually entitled to what

6. So, do not suppress the orphan and do not scold the one who asks and proclaim the favour of your Lord.

they have received. The Almighty counsels the Prophet (sws) that he should not adopt this attitude and just as He gave him refuge as an orphan, he should also give refuge to the orphans of the society, show affection to them and safeguard their rights. I have already explained under the verse (۱۹:۸۹) وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْثَلًا لِّمَا (and you greedily devour the inheritance of the weak, (89:19))⁷ that in pre-Islamic times powerful heirs and relatives would usurp the rights of weak heirs and orphans and would seize all the inheritance a person would leave behind. The words فَلَا تَفْهَرْ refer to this situation. They mean that the Prophet (sws) should not snub orphans and usurp their rights thinking them to be weak individuals of the society. It is obvious that the Prophet (sws) has not been admonished by these words because there was a possibility that he might commit such injustice; in fact, these words sound a warning in an indirect manner to the influential among the Quraysh who have been rebuked in the previous *sūrahs* for such violations of rights. But instead of reforming themselves, these people set about to oppose the Prophet (sws). In this *sūrah*, these people are ignored and the Prophet (sws) is told that whatever attitude they adopt they should be left to themselves; he must however protect the rights of the orphans.

The words وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا يَنْهَرْ state the right of the favour mentioned in the verse وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى. The word سَائِل (he who asks) here is not used in its limited meaning. It is used here rather comprehensively. Whether a person asks for food and clothing or for intellectual guidance or for religious guidance or of any other thing, he should be guided the utmost, and if this is not possible for some reason then the Prophet (sws) should express his inability in a very kind manner and never scold such people. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should remember that he too underwent a period in his life when he was an embodiment of questions and these questions had severely bothered him; at last, the Almighty relieved him of all his worries and answered all his questions. This entails that the Prophet (sws) should also treat with kindness those who ask. He should not adopt the attitude of people who when blessed with riches treat the poor and needy with harshness and who when put through some trial say that the Almighty has humiliated them; at that time they do not remember how they themselves humiliated their own brethren.

The words وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ express the obligation imposed on the Prophet (sws) as a result of what is stated earlier in وَوَجَدَكَ غَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى. I have already referred to the fact that these words do not merely refer to

7. See: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1986), 359.

the wealth which the Prophet (sws) became a beneficiary of after his marriage with Khadījah (rta); they primarily refer to the wisdom of religion and the treasure of *sharī'ah* which has majestically been referred to by the Qur'ān in the words: وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا (٢٦٩:٢) (and he who is blessed with wisdom is indeed blessed with a treasure of great good). In the verse under discussion, one needs to focus one's direction specially on the word فَحَدِّثْ. This word is more appropriate for proclaiming the favour of wisdom rather than proclaiming the favour of wealth. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should declare and proclaim the treasure of wisdom he has been blessed with from the Almighty: just as the Almighty has bestowed it on him free of charge, he too should distribute to others on a complimentary basis and communicate it to every person who comes to him and declare it before every gathering.

By the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*.

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى إِحْسَانِهِ (gratitude be to God for His favour).

Lahore,

6th February 1980 AD

19th Rabī' al-Awwal 1400 AH
